

**Town of Mansfield's
Commission on Aging:
Long-Range Plan**

January 2011-December 2013

A. INTRODUCTION

This plan is an updated version of the plan that was developed for the period 2007-2010, and is intended to provide guidelines and a structure for the Mansfield Commission on Aging as it carries out the following mandate:

1. To study the conditions and needs of elderly persons in relation to housing, economics, employment, health and nutrition, recreation, transportation and other matters.
2. To recommend and evaluate programs to meet the needs of the elderly and to suggest priorities for action.
3. To serve as a resource group to which Mansfield citizens could turn, either individually or as groups, when they have problems or questions about programs or needs of the elderly.
4. To furnish information outlining needs to agencies and groups who are interested in, or who provide services for the elderly.

The plan is also designed to be specific enough to provide direction and a basis for evaluation of ongoing initiatives. It is intended to be fluid and flexible to accommodate changing conditions and acquisition of new knowledge and information. The plan contained in this document covers the period 2011-2013, in the belief that rapidly changing conditions will continue to require an update within the next three years. The group also agreed to incorporate strategies into the Long Range Plan that support realistically achievable and measurable objectives. It is the intent of the Commission to utilize this plan to set priorities and to then identify strategies to achieve specific outcomes.

B. FRAMEWORK

To accomplish the task of creating a long-range plan, the Commission on Aging continued to utilize the framework of a “senior friendly community”. As the State of Connecticut’s “State Plan on Aging” reports, “many of today’s communities are not adequately equipped and “aging sensitive,” to enable older people to remain in their communities with independence and choice. As their needs change, older adults must frequently either move out of their communities or make less than desirable adaptations.” The concept of a “senior friendly” community was developed by the North Carolina Division of Aging as an element of their response to a growing demographic shift in their population. “A senior friendly community offers a wide range of social and economic supports for all citizens, including seniors; values seniors’ contributions to the community; promotes positive intergenerational relations; considers the needs and interests of seniors in physical and community planning; respects and supports seniors’ desire and efforts to live independently; and, acknowledging the primary role that capacity for caring.” The focus of senior-friendly families, friends and neighbors play in the lives of older adults, enhances their community initiatives is

individuals, neighborhoods, agencies, organizations and public and private programs that collaborate to remove barriers to services and opportunities and that improve the quality of life for older adults wherever they live.

A senior-friendly community identifies the following critical factors as elements of the community: Physical Environment, Health, Economy, Technology, Safety/Security, Social/Cultural Involvement, Services/Support, and Transportation, and then evaluates them along the following dimensions: Existence, Adequacy, Accessibility, Equity and Efficiency. The document that results from this evaluative process identifies assets, opportunities and areas for development.

C. POPULATION PROJECTIONS

In developing this plan, it is important to take population projections and demographics into account. In 2009 the American Community Survey estimated that the number of individuals age 65 and older represented 12.6 percent of the U.S. population. In Mansfield that figure is closer to 8%, but by 2030, the number of people age 65 and older will reach 20 percent of the U.S. population, and in Mansfield it is projected that 22% of our population will fall into that group. Older persons who reached age 65 in 1998 could expect to live an additional 17.8 years; women could expect to live another 19.2 years and men another 16 years.

The largest growth rate of older Americans will occur during the next 30 years as the Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, reach age 60. Between 2006 and 2010 the first wave of Baby Boomers turned 60, contributing to a significant increase in Connecticut's older adult population. The population of Mansfield is growing slowly, but with a much larger percentage of our residents living longer and falling into the category of "seniors."

D. HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Connecticut's "Plan of Aging" indicates that there has been a growing appreciation for the fact that while old age may be a time of greater risk for declines in health and daily functions, it need not inevitably be associated with such negative outcomes. There has been an increased awareness that considerable numbers of older adults continue to enjoy relatively high levels of physical and cognitive functioning and remain actively engaged in various life pursuits well into their 70's, 80's and even 90's. Although considerable and needed attention is devoted to health and functioning problems that are most commonly experienced by older adults, aging is not uniformly associated with significant disease and disability.

Commission members continue to feel that there are a wide variety of health-related programs that are currently available in Mansfield, many of which are offered through our Senior/Wellness Center. The key question that arose was

whether or not these services are fully utilized and adequate to meet the needs of our senior residents.

Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:

- Monitor health promotion activities consisting of exercise, nutritional guidance and regular preventive physician visits must continue to be offered if they are to have a long term positive impact upon both health maintenance and cost containment of health care. These services also need to be well publicized.
- Encourage health promotion efforts that focus on identifying risk factors.
- Ensure that seniors are adequately informed about issues related to healthcare, and healthcare providers are better informed about the services provided through the Senior Center.
- Support formation of a Geriatric Committee by the Mansfield Senior Center Association to focus on development of enhanced geriatric services. This might result in the creation of a satellite geriatric clinic.
- Work collaboratively with the MSCA in the promotion of Health and Wellness activities.
- Examine the impact of changes in the Medicare system on seniors in Mansfield.
- Evaluate staffing needs for senior wellness services offered by the Town.

E. ECONOMY/FINANCIAL

Many older adults also live on low and fixed incomes. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, nearly 26,700 older adults in Connecticut live at or below the federal poverty level. In the Town of Mansfield 5.5% of residents age 65 and older live below the federal poverty level, which lags behind the 14% of our total population who live in poverty. While poverty does not appear to be a problem for many senior residents, rising property taxes and the cost of medical insurance do raise concerns for some.

The existing long-range plan identified the need to promote information on such programs as reverse mortgages, investments and insurance. In reviewing the current status of this effort it was noted that the Sparks newsletter makes information available, as well as local publications like the Willimantic Chronicle, WAM Horizons, and the Town of Mansfield Annual Calendar/Report. A question was raised as to how residents get information about available services (such as fee waivers), and what help the Town may be able to provide along these lines. It was also noted that there is a need for information about volunteer conservatorship training. Tax preparation assistance and legal service representation is currently offered at the Senior Center.

Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:

- Reach out proactively to individuals who may qualify for subsidized services.
- Offer periodic education on issues such as estate planning and reverse annuity mortgages.
- Maintain the job listing for seniors currently on the bulletin board.
- Offer a presentation on conservatorship at the Senior Center, and encourage individuals to serve as conservators.

F. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT/HOUSING

The existing long-range plan identified the need to inform residents about housing options and to possibly explore shared housing programs and the impact of younger disabled residents in senior housing facilities. The general feeling is that residents are very familiar with Wright's Village and Juniper Hill, and that there appears to be a wide range of housing needs for seniors, based on service needs, income, and other factors.

One area of significant interest continues to be the development of an assisted living facility in this community. In 2005 the Town of Mansfield contracted with Brecht Associates of Philadelphia, PA to conduct a market feasibility study to determine whether or not the local area could support the location of an assisted living community or related senior housing options. That study indicated that based on qualitative interviews, site analysis, and results of the demand analyses for active adult, independent and assisted living, the conditions are favorable for the development of such projects. In 2008 the Town Council selected Masonicare as a preferred developer for an Independent/Assisted Living project. Masonicare has identified a potential site for their project, and is proceeding with development work. At this point, the town sees itself only as a potential facilitator, and not a developer, of an Independent/Assisted living project in Mansfield.

Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:

- Continue to support the Masonicare Independent/Assisted Living project.
- Advocate for environmental improvements like benches, bus shelters, automatic door openers, etc.
- Make seniors aware of the range of housing options and services available to residents.
- Examine the potential for the addition of supportive structures and devices to assist access to buildings.

G. TECHNOLOGY

The existing long-range plan does not specifically address the area of technology. It should be noted that since 1994 there have been huge strides made in the development and use of technology that is utilized by seniors in many areas of their lives. There is now a well-equipped computer lab at the Senior Center, along with community computers available in the Senior Center, the library and the Community Center. The computers in the Center's computer lab have built-in assistive and adaptive programs for people with disabilities, including a program that can read text aloud. Also, since the last version of this plan, the Town has installed assistive hearing equipment in the Town Council Chambers.

Proposed Action Steps:

- Publicize the broadcasting of Town Council meetings on Channel 13 and the availability of assistive hearing devices in the Council Chambers.
- Explore the use of the "Safelink Wireless System" to use cell phones for emergency calls.

H. SAFETY & SECURITY

The existing long-range plan identified the following priority issues in this area: improved communications regarding existing safety programs, promotion of the use of cell phones, ongoing presentations on safety and security issues, and support for sidewalk construction and maintenance. The feeling was that these items are still relevant and should be incorporated into the revised plan. This was not borne out by the results of the survey.

Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:

- Offer periodic presentations on strategies and programs for protecting assets.
- Offer presentations to provide automatic safety updates to residents.
- Use the TRIAD program as a vehicle to address safety issues and to help inform seniors regarding possible scams, abuses and other areas of safety concerns.
- Focus on scams and different types of senior exploitation by posting information on a bulletin board.

I. SOCIAL & CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT

The existing plan urges advocacy for expansion of Senior Center programs that offer social, recreational, and educational opportunities to all seniors in Town, and expansion of outreach services to seniors who rely on assistance for transportation. The feeling is that there are currently many opportunities in town for volunteerism, intergenerational activities, lifelong learning, and spiritual growth. It was also felt that this community provides ample opportunities for volunteerism, is sensitive to individuals who have disabilities, that information

about programs is well-publicized, and that our community encourages an appreciation for racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity. There is also a feeling that more needs to be done to make these opportunities available to seniors who are confined to their homes. This could include promoting the use of programs such as the Senior Connections conference call programs, or developing a network of craft tutors who would make home visits. As with many of these areas, the issue of transportation comes up as both an obstacle and also an area needing additional support.

Proposed Action Steps:

- Continue to include transportation as an element of social/cultural activities.
- Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of offering reduced cost tickets to events at Jorgensen and other cultural venues.

K. SERVICES & SUPPORT

The area of Services & Support is incorporated into several areas of the existing plan, and tends to cross many lines. This primarily refers to a wide range of programs and services that are designed specifically to meet the needs of seniors. When talking about this area, how to get information out to seniors is a critical question. One suggestion was to use the Sparks newsletter to feature one service on a monthly basis. The publication “At Your Fingertips” was also mentioned as a useful tool, although it needs to be updated. The general feeling is that there are multiple sources of information, including: the Human Services Department, the Library, and the internet. A suggestion was made that there be one phone number identified as the primary source for people to call for Information & Assistance, and the consensus was that this is an appropriate role for the Senior Service Social Worker. Other suggestions included use of the Town Calendar and Infoline.

Proposed Action Steps:

- Continue to utilize Sparks as a key source of information.
- Complete the update of “At Your Fingertips.”
- Provide help with understanding and finding the full range of in-home and community options available to support continued independence and quality of life.
- Review non-profit agency funding requests.
- Encourage outreach efforts aimed at low-income and homebound seniors.

L. TRANSPORTATION

The issue of transportation tends to cross many lines, as it often impacts on the issue of accessibility to programs and services. Reliable and dependable transportation is critical to helping community members remain healthy, productive individuals. Older adults rely on the automobile as their primary mode

of transportation. More than 80 percent of Connecticut's adults' ages 65 and older have active driver's licenses. Many know, however, that at some point changes in vision, hearing, reaction time and other related conditions or illnesses could affect their ability to safely drive. Transportation is important in helping many older adults make crucial connections, but in many locations especially in rural regions such as Mansfield it is often lacking or even nonexistent.

The existing long-range plan identified specific road improvements to be made in town, along with supporting transportation alternatives and the use of Dial-A-Ride services. There is currently a Regional Transportation Plan in place that identifies all plans and priorities for all transportation initiatives in Mansfield, and this needs to be incorporated into this long-range plan, along with the results of studies that have been done on transportation. Since the last version of the plan was written, a Volunteer Driver Program has been implemented for seniors. One suggestion was to look at use of the town's Transportation Advisory Committee as a resource in this area.

Proposed Action Steps:

- Continue to support and promote the use of Dial-A-Ride and the Volunteer Transportation Program.
- Advocate for the installation of bus shelters and benches at all bus stops.
- Explore additional transportation options.
- Offer services to promote safe driving and driver evaluation.

M. SUMMARY

Mansfield is clearly a town that is attractive to seniors and has much to offer. In general seniors seem to appreciate the range of programs and services that are available, and take full advantage of them. It will be the ongoing work of the Commission on Aging to identify specific areas of concern, prioritize issues, and develop an action plan for the commission. It is our hopes that in doing this we will continue to maintain Mansfield's reputation as a desirable residence for all ages.